Louis Braille Centenary

by

Godfrey N. Brown

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

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From the information gathered in this survey it can be readily seen that military personnel are definitely making an effort to improve themselves along educational lines. By this effort they are helping not only themselves but also the military, because it has been definitely proved that an informed soldier is a better and more efficient soldier. Much of the popularity of USAFI has been the result of our advertisement program which is designed to make the soldier aware of the many educational opportunities offered by it. The following is a sample of a simple but effective wording of a poster designed to sell USAFI to the soldier:

Un-informed
Soldiers
Are
Foolish
Indeed

Use
Studying
As a means of
Future
Improvement

United
States
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LOUIS BRAILLE CENTENARY

Godfrey N. Brown
British Student Intern
United Nations

On June 22 the ashes of Louis Braille were interred in the Panthéon in a solemn ceremony to mark the centenary of the death of the greatest benefactor of the blind. M. Vincent Auriol, President of the Republic, attended the service, and representatives of over twenty nations were present. In the Place du Panthéon the silent crowd saw a vivid and strangely moving spectacle. Louis Braille's coffin was borne up the steps between a double row of *gardes républicains,* agleam with casque and cuirasse, and was followed by hundreds of people on whom the brilliant sunshine and uniforms made no impression. They were the blind, young and old alike, who had followed the cortege from the Institution des Jeunes Aveugles in a slow-moving procession. For them the words cut on the façade of the church, *"Aux grands hommes, la patrie reconnaissante,"* were deeply felt although unseen.

Louis Braille's ashes had been brought from his native village, Coupvray near Meaux, where he was born in 1809 and where he lost his sight at the age of three while attempting to cut some leather. He entered l'Institution Royale in Paris when he was ten and so distinguished himself that he became a mathematics teacher there and, aged only 16, began to elaborate his famous alphabet for the blind. The idea of printing in relief was not new; it had been practiced at Valentin Haüy's school for the blind since 1784 and is believed to have been discovered when a blind pupil came across an embossed invitation card and found that he could read it by touch. The great disadvantage of using ordinary letters, however, was the length of time needed in reading while the fingers made out the contours of each letter. Moreover, writing could only be done by means of typographical composition. In 1821 a former artillery captain, Charles Marie Barbier de la Serre, invented a system of "night writing" using dots raised in relief, and it was this system that Louis Braille used as the basis of his alphabet.

Like many great inventions, that of Braille was at once simple and comprehensive. He formed each letter from the varying combinations of six dots in a rectangle, the vertical side containing three dots and the horizontal two. This gave 63 possible combinations, and, after the letters of the alphabet had been formed, the remaining patterns were used for punctuation, contractions, etc. Braille also elaborated a system of musical notation, elementary mathematical symbols, and a system of shorthand. His alphabet was so simple to learn and use that the great majority of 150,000 volumes of the Bibliothèque Braille in Paris have been transcribed by individual well-wishers. Throughout the nineteenth century its use gradually spread to all European countries, and in 1918 it was standardized in America as well.

Today, thanks largely to the work of Unesco, under whose auspices a World Braille Council was set up in December, 1951, great progress is being made in securing the acceptance of Braille throughout the world. Many other systems have been tried, but it is now recognized that Braille's alphabet is the best means of written communication for the blind wherever they may be, and they are usually found in the greatest number in less developed countries where there is no universally agreed system in use. In India, for instance, where the government is very much concerned with the problem, there are two million blind people and at least nine Braille codes in use.

It is hoped that a modified Braille will enable every blind person, no matter what his nationality, to associate roughly the same sounds with each Braille letter. Thus the man who today rests in the Panthéon will have doubly merited that honour. Not only will he have redeemed millions of blind people from the darkness of enforced illiteracy, but he will have diffused light by the invention of the first practical world script.

portion to their number in enrolling in courses, with the fourth group, consisting of high-school graduates, an extremely close third. Following this, there is a definite drop as the educational level becomes lower.

In answer to the second question, it was discovered that mathematics was by far the most popular course, having 352 enrollments. Next came automechanics with 293, followed by English with 267, and bookkeeping and accounting and building construction coming closely behind with 255 and 245, respectively. Merchandising and management was the one other subject with more than 200 enrollments, having a total of 229.

These six subjects had a combined figure of 1,641 enrollments, or 53.6 per cent of the complete total of 3,056 enrollments. Other fields with 70 or more enrollees were: Agriculture, 160; engines, 113; business law, 106; radio, 105; art, 89; psychology, 85; electricity and electrical engineering, 79; and, machine industry, 71. The vocational subjects obviously appealed to the men the most, with 1,066 enrollees. In second place was the academic field with 793, followed by business with 484.

Before drawing any inferences from the preceding figures it is necessary to state that the subjects offered in certain fields are very limited. For example, under education and language, classical, only one subject is offered and the following have only two listed: Foremanship, arithmetic, business English, careers, and economics. However, it may be concluded that "bread-and-butter" subjects have had the greatest popularity—subjects which will directly qualify or make a man more competent to get a job and assist him in earning a livelihood.

Privates enrolled in more courses in proportion to their number than any other group, followed by corporals, sergeants, sergeants first class, and then second lieutenants. The 1,989 privates, which constitute 10.5 per cent of all the ranks present on this post, enrolled in 442 courses, or 18.4 per cent of the entire total. It is an odd fact that the privates-first-class group was by far the most lackadaisical, educationally speaking.

The reasons for enrolling in USAFI courses were divided into the five categories which appeared on the application blank used in enrolling men in these courses. They are: (a) military job or military training, (b) hobby, (c) school or college credit, (d) civilian job or business, and (e) self-improvement. Of the total enrollees 1,251, or 41 per cent, enrolled for civilian-job or business reasons; next came school or college credit with 834. The others followed in this order: self-improvement, 514; military, 221; and hobby, 210.

It was found that radio was taken mainly for military reasons in proportion to its total enrollments. Thirty-eight men (32 per cent of the total number of enrollments) have taken a radio course for this reason. Radio was also most popular for reasons of hobby with 35 men taking it. It places second in this field, with photography first. Twenty-six men (35 per cent of the total taking photography) took it for this reason.

The highest per cent for any category of the men taking a course for a particular reason was English; 183 men enrolled in some level of English for school or college purposes—66 per cent of the total of those who had enrolled in English. Only a shade behind was mathematics, studied by 175 men (65 per cent) for the above reason.

Merchandising and management and building construction were taken for civilian-job or business reasons by 149 and 157, respectively. The percentage was 64.5 for the former and nearly 64 for the latter.

For self-improvement reasons, the language (spoken) course was first in this category with nearly 35 per cent of the enrollments. However, this percentage represented the small number of 16 enrollees. The highest number of enrollees for self-improvement reasons was in mathematics and automechanics with 60 each, and English next with 48.

Perhaps the reason for the popularity of vocational subjects can be attributed to three factors. In the first place some of these men may have quit school before they reached the grade level in which these subjects were offered. This appears to be especially true of automechanics and building construction. Secondly, the school systems these enrollees attended may not have included any or only a few subjects of this nature in their curriculum because of lack of funds and facilities. Lastly, the schools may not have informed their students sufficiently of the values of these subjects in the business world, a factor which may account for the unusual demand of typing among men of this post. No data were gathered on typing since it is not a correspondence course, but it was found to be the most popular of all subjects, there are four on-duty and two off-duty classes, of 25 men each, being conducted continuously.

It is rather difficult to account for the popularity of English and mathematics with the men. One may be inclined to state that while the men were in school they did not fully realize the worthwhileness of these subjects, particularly of English, and did not take this subject in real seriousness. They are only now realizing how important it is to make a favorable impression upon the public and in making a success in their chosen occupation.

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